

ELECTION OF CANTORS IN CSONGRÁD IN 1907 AND 1908

Abstract: In this study I examine the fate of the post of cantor in Csongrád from the death of chief cantor Antal Sohlya up to the official inauguration of the first church cantor not related by blood or marriage to the Sohlya–Hornyik family (1902–1908). Also, to fill a gap in the available information, I describe the procedure for election of a cantor. In my analysis I place special emphasis on showing the different conflicting interests, and on examining the strategies used by the candidates to increase their own chances. How was the lobbying carried out and how were the representatives entitled to vote “softened up”? What interests lay behind the different “factions”, what considerations led to support for a particular cantor? How was all this communicated in the Csongrád press? My sources were minutes of the municipal council, documents on the 1907 and 1908 cantor elections preserved in the Csongrád parish archive, and the press. A knowledge of the political leanings of the Csongrád newspapers at that time is essential for a correct interpretation of the data as very few of the reports are impartial (this is especially the case for articles relevant to our topic).¹

Keywords: cantors, election, societal studies, Csongrád.

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1 The Csongrád newspapers typically functioned as mouth-pieces for the liberal Községi Párt [Community Party] (the local group of the Szabadelvű Párt [Liberal Party]), or the Függetlenségi 48-as Párt [Independence 48 Party] but there is also an example of an independent, “bourgeois” weekly [The ideal of the 1848 revolution and freedom struggle was kept alive by the desire to break away from the Habsburg empire, to form a separate, independent Hungary, and to move beyond the feudal state. After 1884 the spirit of the defeated movement was represented by the Independence 48 Party and the so-called. “forty-eight popular circles”. The ideals of 48 were represented mainly by Antal Csemegi, parish priest Antal Hegyi and chief cantor Antal Sohlya. Among the liberal representatives, special mention must be made of chief notary Gyula Söhlya, teacher János Éder, and lawyers Ferenc Réti and Adolf Holczér (Holló)]. *Tiszavidék* appeared from March 1890, launched by the local liberal intelligentsia. However the founders of *Tiszavidék* backed out from the paper as a consequence of the continuous battle waged with the weekly *Csongrád*; as a result, after 1891 *Tiszavidék* represented the position of the local leaders. *Csongrádi Lap* was launched a year later, its editor-in-chief was János Éder who had departed from *Tiszavidék*. As Éder edited the weekly for a quarter of a century the spirit and political line of *Csongrádi Lap* remained consistently liberal and social democratic. *Csongrádi Újság* was launched by the printers Sándor Bozó and Mihály Justin as their own independent weekly. The paper always dissected current topics of local public life, often in a sarcastic, mocking tone. Dudás 1999. 5–6.

When Antal Sohlya who had been chief cantor became paralysed (1894) the fate of the “splendid and illustrious” post of cantor in Csongrád² became uncertain until 1908. The duties of the incapacitated cantor were taken over by his deputy, Károly Hornyik, the husband of his daughter Jolán. Although the parish priest and the parishioners regularly complained about the frequent absences of the deputy cantor, his poor singing and organ-playing skills³, the post of cantor was not filled in the prescribed way even after the death of chief cantor Sohlya (1902). Many people suspected that Károly Hornyik was allowed to continue in the post because of the influence of his brother-in-law, chief notary Gyula Söhlya⁴. What is certain is that for five years the Csongrád council failed to define who was entitled to participate in election of a cantor or to draw up the scenario for an election.

In the following I examine in detail in chronological order first the background to the cantor election of 1907 then of 1908, describe the course of the election and then the press reactions following the event.

Preparation of the 1907 cantor election

Although our sources indicate that the minutes of the last Csongrád cantor election held on 3 August, 1860 were still in existence at the very beginning of the 20th century⁵, the scenario had become obsolete as the institutions involved in the election had been transformed. The course of the new election had to be set out by both the Csongrád municipal council, the ministry of the interior and the diocesan bishop of Vác in a manner that was both legal and fitting according to the accepted rules. That this was not easily achieved can be seen in the fact that the election was not announced until 1907 even though work had begun on establishing the legal conditions already in 1902, the year following Antal Solyhya’s death.⁶

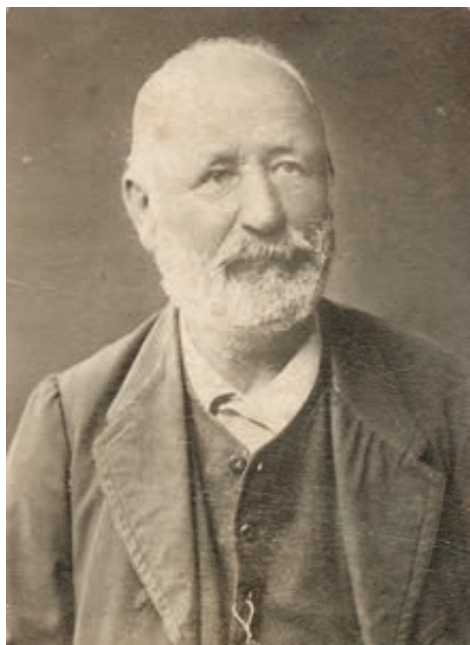
2 Csongrád, the settlement examined lies at the confluence of the Tisza and Körös rivers, in the central part of the Hungarian Great Plain. In the 19th–20th centuries its residents were typically engaged in animal husbandry, agriculture, fishing and vine-growing; before 1848 they were serfs on land owned by the nobility who were not required to pay state taxes or serfs with the right to freedom of movement. Csongrád was a religiously homogeneous settlement, 98% of the population were Roman Catholic and Hungarian-speaking which meant that for centuries the parish community and the settlement were practically identical. In the early 20th century around 23,000–24,000 people belonged to the Csongrád Roman Catholic parish.

3 For more details on the affair of the retirement of Antal Sohlya and on Károly Hornyik, see: Gyöngyössi 2014. 132–134.

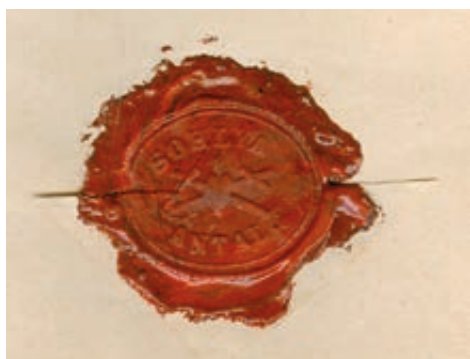
4 According to our sources, Antal Sohlya’s son signed his name as Söhlya, occasionally also as Sólya. In this article I use the names in the form they appear in the primary sources; that is, Sohlya for the chief cantor and Söhlya for his descendants.

5 The minutes concerned could not be found in 2016 either in the archive or in the parish archive.

6 See: MNL CsML CsL Csongrád Város Képviselőtestületének jegyzőkönyvei [Minutes of Csongrád Municipal Council] V. B. 71 a26. 18 December 1903. 18. jk. 357. sz. resolution no. 360/903 of the official commission of the county of Csongrád concerning the partial amendment of resolution no. 198/903 on the election of a cantor.



Antal Sohlya, chief cantor of Csongrád.
Photo: CsKK TLM Library 2451.



Antal Sohlya's stamp.
MNL CsML CsL School board minutes,
10 June 1877.

A number of factors played a part in the slow progress made in the preparations. Foremost of these was the disorder that arose in religious life following the sudden departure of the parish priest Antal Hegyi. When the episcopal see of Vác began investigations against the parish priest in 1902 (on the grounds of missing mass money), Antal Hegyi suddenly emigrated to America. The temporary administrator sent in his place worked mainly on clarifying the financial situation of the parish, winding up contracts, accounts and agreements. It was not until 1903 that the people of Csongrád gained a new, real spiritual leader with the appointment in 1903 of József Porubszky as parish priest. In the meantime the local municipal council was stressing with increasing force the need to divide the Csongrád parish into two, and ordered the revision of the fees due to church employees. Relations between the county bishop of Vác and the Csongrád authorities were overshadowed by the question of the Saint Roch church in Belsőváros and ownership of the cemetery; in 1905 Bishop Károly Csáky even sued the town leaders. The cantor question was thus only one of numerous church matters awaiting a solution that were moreover complicated by sensitive local political ties given that they involved the family of the chief notary. But what exactly hap-

pened in Csongrád between 1903 and 1907 in the matter of election of a cantor?

In February-March 1903 the local council requested the archdeacon of Szentes to adopt a position on the principles and rules to be applied in the course of the coming election of a cantor.⁷ In place of an answer the archdeacon sent a copy of

⁷ NPI 17 March 1903. Summary of the minutes of the Csongrád council assembly (copy). Communication from the office of the archdeacon of Szentes no. 38/903 on establishing the manner of electing a cantor. Attachment: regulation no. 94486/899 vall. és közokt. min. on the election of a cantor in

a letter from Gyula Wlassics minister of religious affairs and education, written in December 1899 to the county Bishop of Vác concerning the election of a cantor in Kiskundorozsma. The town council, as the holder of the advowson for the Dorozsma church wished to sidestep church approval of the person elected as cantor, while the bishop would have insisted on the final act of approval (generally a mere formality). In connection with the Dorozsma affair the minister set out in detail his opinion on what he regarded as the proper order for the election of a cantor and the guidelines to be followed.⁸

At the Csongrád council meeting held on 17 March 1903 the chief notary Gyula Sóhlya read out the minister's letter, then immediately gave his argument for why the Dorozsma case could not be regarded as a pattern to follow. He stressed as an essential difference that the holder of the advowson of the Csongrád parish church was the ducal Károlyi family of Nagykárolyi, not the town. He further stressed that on the occasion of the election of a cantor in 1860 non-Catholic members of the council had exercised their right to vote; consequently if this condition is not met in the future the Jewish and Calvinist council members would be deprived of their rights.

This latter statement by the chief notary provoked a heated debate. Dr. Mihály Szarka, Gyula Sóhlya's plucky political opponent took a firm stand in favour of only Roman Catholic representatives being allowed to exercise their right to vote. Rabbi Márton Büchler then observed that – as far as he knew – the Jewish representatives had not intended to interfere in the election of the Catholic cantor. But he also declared that if they were officially forbidden “they will hardly be in a position to continue in that intention”⁹. To keep the emotions under control, the Csongrád magistrate wanted to order that representatives indicate their

Kiskundorozsma.

8 In his letter Gyula Wlassics points out to the Dorozsma council that the cantor is an employee of the church, consequently the approval of the higher church body is needed for his legal operation, furthermore that the appointment of his person is not part of the rights of the holder of the advowson. According to his position, the vacancy must be advertised and the church county authority informed of the announcement. The applications submitted must be forwarded to the district archdeacon who will propose a date for an audition. The nomination committee is composed of nine elected representatives and the local parish priest, it is chaired by the district archdeacon. After the audition the committee submits to the local authority its list of candidates considered most suitable, then within three days it provides for convocation of the assembly to elect a cantor and decides on the date. The cantor is thus elected by the council on a day set jointly with the diocesan authority, to which the episcopal commissioner is invited as a delegate. The non-Roman Catholic members of the council are to refrain from voting. Should an objection be raised to the election procedure, a complaint must be submitted to the competent public administration authority and to the diocese authority. The diocese authority either confirms the election within 30 days, or refuses to give its approval for finalisation of employment of the chosen cantor, giving its reasons. If no reply is received from the bishop within 30 days, the candidate's appointment is automatically confirmed. The cantor's fee is to be set out in a letter drawn up by the local authority on the basis of the resolution of the council and the diocese authority. The regulation approved by the minister for Dorozsma shall remain in force as long as Dorozsma has an independent church council, or until some other regulation of national validity comes into force. NPI letter from minister Gyula Wlassics to Bishop of Vác Károly Csák, 21. December 1899. (copy).

9 NPI 17 March 1903. Summary of the minutes of the Csongrád council assembly (copy).

vote by standing up, but Dr. Szarka argued for a roll call vote. Gyula Sóhlya then reminded the meeting that the agreement of at least ten representatives was needed to order a roll call vote. "A considerable disturbance arose following this statement, and the magistrate chairing the meeting, who wished to order the vote, was unable to make himself heard, and meanwhile representative Dr. Mihály Szarka drew up a form calling for a roll call vote, had it signed by ten representatives and submitted it to the second magistrate in the chair"¹⁰. Although a number of those present judged Szarka's action to be scandalous, in the end the roll call vote was ordered. With only a few votes' difference the representatives accepted Dr. Mihály Szarka's proposal, and accordingly it was declared that only Roman Catholic representatives had the right to vote.¹¹

Two further questions arose at the meeting. Liberal representative Ferenc Réti objected that by setting up the planned nine-member nomination committee the right of free election would be restricted, as the remaining representatives would only be able to vote for one of the committee's candidates. Réti's reservations met with no response. However, a number of representatives expressed concern about accepting episcopal approval – as in the Dorozsma case. After a short debate the Csongrád council formed the position that as long as the cantor received his housing and remuneration from the town, there is no legal ground for approval to be given by the diocesan bishop.¹²

The newly appointed Csongrád parish priest, József Porubszky was incensed by the council's decision and submitted an appeal to the County Public Administration Authority. The parish priest argued that when electing the cantor the council represented not the political community but the religious community: and the higher authority of the religious community was the diocesan bishop. The decision on whether canon law has any objection to the cantor fell within the jurisdiction of the diocesan authority.¹³

A year later there was still great uncertainty over the course of the election and the entitlements of the institutions involved. The council therefore turned for help to Lajos Virter who had served as Csongrád parish priest between 1850 and 1854 and had since been appointed episcopal vicar. The Csongrád faithful held Lajos Virter in genuine affection, and even after his transfer he returned to the settlement from time to time if there was need for conciliation or sober words. Father József Porubszky was asked to write the letter, and the elderly Father Virter replied with unusual brevity. He replied that if the people of Csongrád have a concrete question, he would willingly give an answer; however, he is unable to make a recommendation in general terms. "Besides, the cantor is elected by

10 NPI 17 March 1903. Summary of the minutes of the Csongrád council assembly (copy).

11 It was presumably with the intention of making the interest groups manifest that Dr. Mihály Szarka insisted that the names be included in the minutes. Certainly the result of the roll call vote provides a guide in mapping the force lines within the Csongrád council and in identifying the supporters of Sóhlya Gyula and his "opponents".

12 NPI 17 March 1903. Summary of the minutes of the Csongrád council assembly (copy).

13 NPI 31 March 1903. Letter from parish priest József Porubszky to the County Public Administration Authority.

the people with the archdeacon in the chair, and the minutes of the election are submitted to me for approval, as is the case elsewhere.”¹⁴

We know from secondary sources that between 1903 and 1907 both the episcopal approval and the question of the right of non-Catholic representatives to vote came before a number of secular and ecclesiastical authorities. Finally in January 1907 the public administration court ruled that only Catholic representatives could vote on the person of the Catholic cantor, and the validity of the cantor's activity depended on the approval of the diocesan bishop. At the same time the court also declared that further questions related to the election of a cantor did not belong within the competence of the secular court.¹⁵

In view of this it could be supposed that the matter of the cantor's position would be settled within the foreseeable future. At the beginning of the year the question was again raised in the local press, the number of articles on the subject and opinion pieces increased. In January *Csongrádi Lap* stressed that in view of the merits of the case Károly Hornyik who had been serving as deputy for ten years should be appointed chief cantor.¹⁶ The intention to support Hornyik did not generally appear later in the paper. Meanwhile *Csongrádi Újság* waged a determined campaign against Söhlya and Hornyik; family interest overriding public interest, the intentional obstruction of cantor elections and unfair lobbying



Károly Hornyik with his wife, Jolán Sohlya. Photo: Property of Gyula Hajdú.

14 NPI 15 June 1904. Letter from vicar general Lajos Virter to the Csongrád parish priest.

15 *Csongrádi Lap*, 20 January 1907. Vol. XVII, no. 4, p. 2; *Csongrádi Újság*, 20 January 1907. Vol. V, no. 3, p. 3.

16 *Csongrádi Lap*, 20 January 1907. Vol. XVII, no. 4, p. 2.

were recurring themes in the relevant articles. The principal but not the sole target of the accusations was the chief notary Söhlya. Others too were prompted to act by the desire to win the post: "The post has not yet been announced, but canvassing has already begun to soften up the RC representatives. God-fearing sons have stepped up in support of their fathers, sending a barrage of letters to the "respected" community representatives, of whose existence they were earlier probably not even aware."¹⁷

Csongrádi Újság proposed that in the interests of fair competition candidates who came under suspicion of bribery should be excluded, and before the election no one should be allowed to sing in the church: "because there is no need for the devout public to be kept in a state of excitement for weeks and months".¹⁸

Why was a date not set for the elections if there was no longer a legal justification for postponement following the January ruling? – the paper asked in its issue of 25 August. Here too they suspected – as earlier – that "manoeuvring" by the chief notary was behind it.¹⁹ In the second half of the article we learn that besides being the brother-in-law of Gyula Söhlya, Károly Hornyik also had other "sins". According to the author writing in *Csongrádi Újság* the deputy cantor spent most of his time in his vineyard in Kecskemét, while the post of cantor in Csongrád "suffers in sad neglect", and all the duties of cantor are performed by assistants. The negligence of the cantor assistants is most evident at funerals.²⁰ Moreover, the fees to be paid for funeral services were not regulated, so there was nothing to prevent the cantor's abuses.²¹

The long-awaited announcement finally appeared on 1st September 1907 in *Tiszavidék* and *Csongrádi Lap*, on the 1st and 8th in *Népnevelő* educational affairs gazette, and then on 12th September in *Néptanítók Lapja* [Elementary Schoolteachers' Paper]. The text was as follows:

"Applications are invited for the post of RC cantor in Csongrád. Annual income: 1. Housing and garden in kind. 2. Usufruct of 30 kat. hold (17 hectares) of arable land. 3. 800 crowns paid by the municipality. 4. Income of around 3000 crowns from surplice fees, from which the cantor is required to keep an assistant with a pleasant voice and familiar with church ceremonies, and to participate in services in both churches. A teaching diploma is required, as well as

¹⁷ *Csongrádi Újság*, 2 June 1907. Vol. V, no. 22, p. 2.

¹⁸ *Csongrádi Újság*, 2 June 1907. Vol. V, no. 22, p. 2.

¹⁹ According to the author of the article Gyula Söhlya was arguing in favour of voting rights for the non-Catholic representatives because he hoped that the Jewish voters would strengthen the position of Károly Hornyik. *Csongrádi Újság*, 25 August 1907. Vol. V, no. 34, p. 2.

²⁰ "It is sufficient to mention that the singing of the prescribed church hymns 'Venite exultemus' and 'Laudate pueri' has already gone out of fashion at funerals. The cantors do not sing them either in Latin or in Hungarian, they shout only a few words of them then immediately launch into 'Requiem aeternam' and 'Gloria Patri', in order to leave more time for the farewells." *Csongrádi Újság*, 25 August 1907. Vol. V, no. 34, p. 2.

²¹ *Csongrádi Újság*, 25 August 1907. Vol. V, no. 34, p. 2.



János Éder, Gyula Söhlya and Mihály Sághy in the early 20th century.
Photo: Property of Gyula Hajdú.

a certificate for service as a cantor. The successful candidate must comply with provisions of the agreement reached in 1904 and reinforced by the authorities, both as regards the collection of surplice and funeral fees, and in other matters. Applications must be sent by 28th September to abbot-parish priest József Porubszky. The election will be held on 30th September preceded by an audition on the morning of the same day.”²²

Csongrádi Újság made a thorough study of the announcement. The first thing they pointed out to readers was the strikingly short deadline; instead of the six weeks usually allowed in such announcements, applications had to be submitted within four weeks. They also noted that the time of the announcement and the audition was not specified; “because we do not want to believe that this important point has been left out of the announcement so that applicants cannot appear for the audition”.²³ The paper also found suspicious elements in the leaked scenario for the election, and expressed at length its indignation that the council did not appoint musical experts.²⁴

²² *Néptanítók Lapja*, 12 September 1907. Vol. XL, no. 38. See. NPI “Kántorok” folder.

²³ *Csongrádi Újság*, 15 September 1907. Vol. V, no. 37, p. 2.

²⁴ “Well, how?? Surely the cantor to be elected must have musical sensitivity and training? Is it perhaps sufficient for him to be able to recite the funeral texts and shout in the church?” *Csongrádi Újság*, 15 September 1907. Vol. V, no. 37, p. 2.

This article, speculating on connivance between the parish and the pro-Sóhlya representatives did not escape the attention of parish priest Porubszky. In a letter he refuted point by point the accusations made in the article; he indicated that the majority of representatives were landowners and had asked for the postponement of the election in view of the summer agricultural work. The much-criticised announcement had been formulated in agreement with the district archdeacon. At the end of his letter Father Porubszky assured the editor-in-chief that the election would be held “under just and impartial direction”. The editor was not convinced by the parish priest’s arguments.²⁵

The last article before the cantor election appeared a day before the event, on 29 September. The writer of the article in *Csongrádi Újság* took stock one last time of the factors that could indicate the intentional obstruction of candidates or the intention to cause confusion. The writer expressed his “fear” much more clearly than previously: “The announcement of the vacancy is a mere formality in the Csongrád church, and in the election they will not look for the candidate most fit for this splendid post, on the contrary they will look for a way of giving it to an individual who has neither the qualifications nor the natural endowments required for the position”.²⁶

The month-long build-up was not without result: the approaching cantor election became the number one event in public life. The articles in *Csongrádi Újság* created the impression that if Károly Hornyik were to be the winner it would represent the victory of family interest over public interests and would be to the detriment of the Catholics of Csongrád. Accordingly, the outcome of the Csongrád cantor election would be a gauge the morality of the council, showing the degree to which they could be bribed.

The course of the election on the basis of the official minutes

On 31 September 1907. 25 of the expected 27 applicants appeared at the Csongrád town hall to compete for the post of chief cantor. The list of candidates by name, age and place of activity was as follows:

Almásy, László (49) Kiskundorozsma
 Ertl, Gábor (24) Zilah
 Fehér, Ármin (35) Ada
 Hajas, Lajos (55) Békésszentandrás
 Hervanek, Gyula (36) Csonoplya
 Hornyik, Károly (49) Csongrád
 Hyross, Péter (31) Lopér [Lopej]

²⁵ *Csongrádi Újság*, 22 September 1907. Vol. V, no. 38, p. 2.

²⁶ *Csongrádi Újság*, 29 September 1907. Vol. V, no. 39, p. 2.

Kalmár, Illés (36) Salgótarján
 Kulcsár, József (56) Újkécske [now: Tiszkécske]
 Kutor, Árpád (26) Kaposvár
 Libássy, Rajmund (27) Mesterszállás
 Markovics, Elek (33) Jánoshida
 Mezey, István (26) Mezőkovácsháza
 Pelle, Gyula (25) Alsóábrány [now: Bükkábrány]
 Petróczy, József (24) Hevescsány [now: Csány]
 Rácz, N. János (31) Nagykánizsa
 Retek, János (24) Érmihályfalva
 Richter, József (27) Isaszeg
 Sipos, Péter (?) Pusztavacs
 Szabó, Gyula (25) Bába (?)
 Szappanos, Imre (42) Sátoraljaújhely
 Szemplér, Vilmos (46) Okorvölgy
 Ujházi, Miklós (44) Endrőd
 Vincze, Mihály (26) Felsődabas [now: Dabas]
 Wurdák, Ferenc (21) Kassa
 Zubán, Mihály (26) Kiszombor

The candidate from Kiskundorozsma, László Almásy figured prominently in the county papers in 1892. That was the year of the cantor election in Dorozsma already mentioned, where the authorities barely escaped being lynched, and that gave rise to the ruling by Gyula Wlassics.²⁷ In view of what happened, it is surprising that Almásy was still in Dorozsma. Another of the applicants was a member of the large Mezey dynasty of cantors, István Mezey Jr (1881–1936), who sent his application from Mezőkovácsháza for the post in Csongrád.²⁸ Miklós Ujházy was cantor in Gyomaendrőd and was already regarded as a cantor-poet of national fame thanks to his book of funeral songs published a few years earlier.²⁹ He had been serving in Endrőd for close to twenty years when he entered

²⁷ According to the *Szentesi Lap* reporter, the cantor election was only a pretext for sparking tension between the council members in Dorozsma who were obstructing land distribution, and the local population. "The majority of the people, those in favour of land distribution, wanted Rigó József of Törökbecse as cantor. And Rigó had not even finished his singing at the audition when the mass of people gathered in the church broke out in loud cries of: Long live Rigó! [...] Because the rumour had spread among the people that the 'masters' did not want to elect Rigó, a crowd of around two thousand people suddenly gathered outside the town hall and then occupied the rooms, courtyard and corridors of the building, threatening to kill the council members if they wanted to elect anyone other than Rigó. [At this point the judge's candidate, László Almásy sent a telegram calling for help; and before long thirty soldiers from Szeged and eighty gendarmes arrived and began to brutally disperse the crowd]. After the people scattered and the streets were quiet, the election began in the large council hall. Twenty-one of Dorozsma's 13,000 inhabitants voted, and since they were all supporters of Cékus, they voted for Almásy. [...] An appeal has been submitted and the embittered people are prepared to stone Almásy when he first appears in the church." *Szentesi Lap*, 3 January 1892. Vol. XXII, no. 2. pp. 2–4.

²⁸ For more detail on the life and activity of the later chief cantor in Kunszentmárton, see: Barna 2009. 451–452.

²⁹ Ujházy, Miklós: Római Katolikus halotti búcsúztatók [Roman Catholic funeral songs]. Kiadja

the competition for chief cantor in Csongrád. Apart from Károly Hornyik, the only candidate whose name had appeared in the local papers before the elections was Illés Kalmár cantor in Salgótarján. In its issue on 29 September *Csongrádi Lap* named him as an excellent singer and recommended him to the attention of the representatives with voting rights.³⁰

Examining the places where the activists operated, it can be seen that for the most part young cantors from smaller settlements to the north and east of Csongrád, in Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok and Békés counties tried to win the position in Csongrád that promised a higher income [9]. Cantors in Transdanubia and the county centres were less attracted by the opportunity in Csongrád [6]. While only three applicants came from within 60 kilometres of the town, others came from distant places: Southern Hungary (Délvidék), Transylvania and Upper Hungary [6].

The sub-prefect was represented by Dr. János Csucs deputy chief administrative officer³¹, the family holding the advowson by Mihály Lichtnekker estate bailiff from Felgyő, and the diocesan bishop by Pál Korpás the district archdeacon who also chaired the meeting held to elect a cantor.³² Three Catholic representatives



Posts held by applicants for the 1907 cantor election. Compiled by: Orsolya Gyöngyössi 2016.

Kner Izidor, Gyoma, 1904. In the mid-20th century Andor Korsós, Csongrád cantor also owned a copy of the book. For further data, see: Gyöngyössi 2010. 34.

30 *Csongrádi Lap*, 29 September 1907. Vol. XVII, no. 40, p. 2.

31 NPI Instructions from the sub-prefect, 28 September 1907. Szentes.

32 MNL CsML CSL Minutes of the Csongrád Municipal Council V. B. 71. a 31. 30 September 1907. minutes no. 366.

were asked to confirm the minutes.³³ After greeting those present, Pál Korpás announced that two of the 27 applicants had withdrawn, and a further eight candidates either did not provide a document certifying their qualification as a cantor or had to be excluded because of their age.³⁴

Council member József Szabados was the first to speak; he requested that the contract with the future chief cantor of Csongrád include the list of surplice fees agreed on in 1904, and the provision that he be obliged to voluntarily renounce a part of his remuneration in the case of the Csongrád parish being divided into two. Szabados also proposed that it be set down in writing that the cantor could not leave Csongrád without the permission of the parish priest, and that he must keep an assistant with musical training. The assembly accepted his proposals.³⁵ Dr. Mihály Szarka noted in this connection that the minutes of the 1904 agreement on surplice fees had not yet been approved by the county, consequently the matter needed to be clarified without delay.³⁶

It was the task of nine Catholic representatives to select the most suitable candidates from the 17 cantors still in competition for the post³⁷. In addition to the former parish priest Antal Hegyi and the chief notary Gyula Söhlya the nominations committee included several wealthy Csongrád landowners and lawyers.³⁸ After the committee was set up, Pál Korpás suspended the assembly for the duration of the audition.

The official election minutes continues after the re-opening of the session. We learn that on the basis of the impression formed from the audition, the documents of the cantors and the opinion of the music experts, the committee proposed in first place Illés Kalmár, followed by Károly Hornyik, Gyula Pelle, Ármin Fehér and Miklós Ujházy. Dr. Mihály Szarka and Gyula Söhlya again clashed over the way in which the final voting was to be conducted; the former proposed the use of voting cards, the latter a roll-call vote. Finally the council members adopted the proposal of the chief notary.³⁹ In the final voting 25 representatives voted for Károly Hornyik, 10 for Illés Kalmár, and one for Ármin Fehér. Parish priest József

33 Dr. Mihály Szarka, Imre Nagypál, Mihály Ornyik. MNL CsML CsL Minutes of the Csongrád Municipal Council V. B. 71. a 31. 30 September 1907. minutes no. 366.

34 Because the contract hiring the cantor is regarded as an official document, it cannot be signed by a minor. Under Hungarian law at that time the legal age did not begin until the age of 24.

35 MNL CsML CsL Minutes of the Csongrád Municipal Council V. B. 71. a 31. 30 September 1907. minutes no. 367.

36 MNL CsML CsL Minutes of the Csongrád Municipal Council V. B. 71. a 31. 30 September 1907. minutes no. 368.

37 The 17 cantors auditioned were: Gábor Ertl, Ferenc Wurdák, Árpád Kutor, Imre Szappanos, Mihály Zubán, Péter Sipos, Illés Kalmár, Gyula Szabó, Miklós Ujházy, Gyula Pelle, Rajmund Libássy, Péter Hyross, Ármin Fehér, Károly Hornyik, János Rácz, József Richter, János Retek.

38 The members of the committee were: Antal Hegyi, Mihály Szarka, Gyula Söhlya, Imre Nagypál, Károly Dragon, József Szabados, Antal Faragó, Ferenc Herke, Gergely Justin. Parish priest József Porubszky, the district archdeacon, the holder of the advowson and the representative of the county were *ex officio* members.

39 MNL CsML CsL Minutes of the Csongrád Municipal Council V. B. 71. a 31. 30 September 1907. minutes no. 371.

Porubszky and Dr. Miklós Sörös a physician did not vote.⁴⁰ The diocesan bishop, the county authority, the Csongrád parish priest and the cantor were informed of the victory of Károly Hornyik with an extract from the minutes.

Press reactions

“A donkey loaded with a sack of gold can enter places
that are out of the reach of cannons and bayonets.”⁴¹

While the above minutes recorded the official course of the assembly held to elect a cantor, the journalists reported on the auditions and the general mood. We regard these articles – like the press sources already cited – as factors shaping public opinion; it cannot be the aim of a historical-social anthropological investigation to judge the truth of their contents.

According to the press report the Church of Our Lady was crowded for the cantor auditions. Since the official evaluation sheet of the auditions has not survived, we can cite only the opinion of the journalist writing in *Csongrádi Újság*. In describing the candidates' singing the paper used the words *ringing, broad, clear, intelligent, pleasant, stretched, slow, sounding between the teeth, shaky, veiled* or even *scratchy*. The analyst found the organ-playing for the most part *basic, weak, tolerable* or *satisfactory*. We read the following about the cantors supported by the nominations committee:

“Seventh: *Illés Kalmár*, big, flexible baritone voice, excellent organist, light, reliable responses. [...] Ninth: *Miklós Újházi*, powerful, flexible baritone voice, organ-playing light, regular, responses reliable. Tenth: *Gyula Pelle*, pleasant, flexible baritone voice, regular organ-playing, responses reliable, apt. Thirteenth: *Ármin Fehér*, organ-playing full, regular, voice a ringing high tenor, intelligent, smooth singing, responses pleasant, but not sufficiently regular. Fourteenth: *Károly Hornyik*, organ-playing basic, voice a high tenor, singing forced, artificial, more like shouting, responses uncertain.”⁴²

40 The following persons voted for Károly Hornyik: Mihály Blázsik, János Cseh, Károly Dragon, Imre Deák, Pál Szőke Jr, Ferenc Galambos, Sándor Szabó, Ferenc Herke, János Huszka, István Kaszaniczky, József Kasztel, Jenő Réti, András Márton, Mihály Ornyik, Mihály Pintér, Mihály Szarka, Sándor Tekulics, János A. Túri, László A. Túri, Gyula Sólya, Elemér Kovács, Péter Faragó, Lajos Gillniger, Mihály Zságer, Gergely Sinkó, Pál A. Túri. The following voted for Illés Kalmár: Antal Faragó, Mihály Lichtnekker, Márton Fekete, Antal Hegyi, Imre Fűri, Imre Nagypál, Antal Ötvös, János Máté, Dr. Mihály Szarka, István Vári. József Szabados voted for Ármin Fehér.

41 *Csongrádi Újság*, 13 October 1907. Vol. V, no. 42, pp. 2–3.

42 *Csongrádi Újság*, 6 October 1907. Vol. V, no. 40, p. 2.

The above evaluation gave the newspaper sufficient grounds for a closer examination of Hornyik's victory. In practice we see that *Csongrádi Újság* gave great space to gossip about the chief notary and his son-in-law "in place of an examination". People were talking about a secret meeting, torn up agreement, bribes, making payment for an official post, dissatisfied masses and future calling to account; there was talk of expulsion from the church and suspension. It was said that the chief notary "imposed" the inclusion of Károly Hornyik on the list of candidates despite the fact that he was not recommended by the music experts.⁴³ Even the deputy cantor's "ugly, Slovak name" was mentioned against him.⁴⁴

The possibility that news of the cantor election under suspicion of unfairness could spread throughout the country keenly affected the pride of the people of Csongrád. It may have been with this in mind that *Csongrádi Újság* cited a report that appeared in *Salgótarjáni Lapok* that "expressed strong criticism of the fact that although the result was known in advance they still dared to call for applications".⁴⁵ The accusation of disregard of the people's will at the election held in 1892 in Kiskundorozsma was also fuel to the fire; just as János Rigó became the people's choice in Dorozsma, Illés Kalmár was the popular candidate in Csongrád, and the fact that he was not chosen was regarded as the defeat of the popular will by the authorities.

On the whole it can be seen that for *Csongrádi Újság* influencing public opinion over the cantor elections became a matter of strategic importance; it was achieved not only through the articles, in practice it also took on the role of "honest opposition" to the Söhlya supporters. On the evening of the election Dénes Tóth, the editor of *Csongrádi Újság* invited the applicants to the Citizens' Circle. At the supper the two national anthems were sung by the cantors together, a performance that was warmly applauded.⁴⁶

Csongrádi Lap evaluated the events in an entirely different tone. The very first report, published after the cantor election, was limited to a neutral account of the events.⁴⁷ The next communication, that can be regarded as adopting a position, was a response to a reader's letter. The anonymous writer of the letter expressed indignation, because in his opinion Károly Hornyik was confirmed in his position only through his fortunate connections, not because of his abilities. The paper's author recognised that Károly Hornyik was the weakest applicant, but it nevertheless held that the representatives had decided correctly. After all, Hornyik was

43 *Csongrádi Újság*, 6 October 1907. Vol. V, no. 40, p. 3.

44 *Csongrádi Újság*, 6 October 1907. Vol. V, no. 40, p. 2.

45 *Csongrádi Újság*, 10 November 1907. Vol. V, no. 45, p. 3.

46 *Csongrádi Újság*, 6 October 1907. Vol. V, no. 40, p. 2.

47 "The election of a cantor was held last Monday. 22 applications were submitted. During the morning all the candidates were auditioned for singing and organ-playing. The expert opinion qualified several candidates as outstanding, particularly Illés Kalmár cantor of Salgótarján, whose singing drew a storm of applause and shouts of approval. However the position was nevertheless won by Károly Hornyik with 25 votes for and 15 against, in view of the fact that he has been active here already for 25 years. We have heard that it was set out in the minutes as a condition that the elected cantor must employ a permanent, musically trained assistant." *Csongrádi Lap*, 6 October 1907. Vol. XII, no. 40, p. 3.

a “decent, honest man, he has founded a large family here, and so it would have been inhuman to simply remove him from his position”.⁴⁸ He saw the solution to be to hire an assistant with real musical talent who, if the need arose, could also organise and direct a church choir.⁴⁹

The last press item on the 1907 cantor election in Csongrád appeared in January 1908. We read in the article that following an appeal submitted to it, the episcopal see of Vác had ordered an investigation to be headed by papal chamberlain Szilveszter Kádár – parish priest of Mindszent, while the public administration authority had appointed Dr. János Csucs chief magistrate. The hearings began in January 1908.⁵⁰

The background to the 1908 election

The investigation into the 1907 cantor election had not even been concluded when five months later chief cantor Károly Hornyik who was barely 50 years old died as a consequence of heart failure.

“The undersigned, in their own name and on behalf of numerous relatives announce with deepest sorrow that the most tender, kind and faithful husband, loving, caring good father, true brother, son-in-law and dear relative Károly Hornyik, RC chief cantor passed away peacefully in the Lord at 8 in the evening on 29th February in his 50th year, the 23rd year of happy marriage, after brief suffering and receiving the Last Sacrament. The cold body of the deceased will be given the last rites according to the ceremony of the Roman Catholic Church in the home of the cantor at 11 a.m. on the 2nd and will then be accompanied to the railway station for transportation to Kecskemét where it will be laid to rest. The atonement mass will be held in the RC church at 8 a.m. on the 5th. Csongrád, 1st March 1908. Blessing and peace to his remains. His wife, widow Mrs Károly Hornyik née Jolán Sóhlya. His children Sándor, Károly István, Mariska Mrs Pál Hajas, János, Margit, László, His siblings Mária, Rozália, Fanni, Anna, Ferenc, József. His son-in-law Pál Hajas. His brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law László Bagi, Katalin Jungmayer, Judith Horváth, Gyula Sóhlya, Ilona Sóhlya, Béla Farkas, Luca Forgó.”⁵¹

48 *Csongrádi Lap*, 6 October 1907. Vol. XII, no. 40, p. 2.

49 *Csongrádi Lap*, 6 October 1907. Vol. XII, no. 40, p. 2.

50 *Csongrádi Lap*, 19 January 1908. Vol. XVIII, no. 3, p. 3.

51 *Csongrádi Lap*, 8 March 1908. Vol. XVIII, no. 10, pp. 2–3.

We learn from the lengthy obituary that Hornyik was buried in Kecskemét, the town where he was born. Many people took this as *post facto* recognition that the chief cantor had not been attached to Csongrád, that is, it had been a mistake on 1907 to present Hornyik as “one of us”, that is, a citizen of Csongrád.⁵²

With the approval of the diocesan bishop, Hornyik’s widow Jolán Söhlya received the cantor’s remunerations for six months after his death while the customary tasks were performed by two assistants. Such requests by cantor’s widows must have been quite common; the same thing happened in Csongrád in 1859, after the death of Lajos Kmeth, and we know of a similar case in neighbouring Kunszentmárton.⁵³ Nevertheless in 1908 we find that the political opponents of chief notary Söhlya regarded the situation as playing for time and in serious violation of public interests, saying: “the post of Csongrád cantor is not intended to support orphans and widows.”⁵⁴

In a March issue of *Csongrádi Újság* a long article appeared on the matter of election of a cantor that had again become timely. According to the article the people of Csongrád needed an able and trained cantor, who in addition to the customary tasks could also keep up a choir. On the basis of the experiences of the previous election they recommended Illés Kalmár, cantor of Salgótarján to the public’s attention.⁵⁵

While in 1907 the people of Csongrád heard the candidates only on the day of the election, in 1908 the council gave its permission for them to show their abilities on the occasion of a mass or procession. As a result, for months one cantor after another came, some once, others several times to persuade the faithful of Csongrád of their abilities. The returning, determined candidates had a beneficial effect in easing the lack of a cantor, and also kept up interest in the approaching election. The candidates gradually attracted their own growing groups of supporters.⁵⁶

The first, preparatory general assembly was convened in May, at the urging of parish priest József Porubszky. The purpose was to decide on a date for the cantor election.⁵⁷ The parish priest asked the council to set the election for June, “because the harvest begins on Saint Peter and Paul day and the Roman Catholic members who work on the land will not be able to be present for the election

52 “People criticised the cantor even after his death because he was laid to rest not here in Csongrád, but in his native town of Kecskemét.” *Csongrádi Lap*, 5 April 1908. Vol. XVIII, no. 14, p. 2; “That his heart never belonged to Csongrád, is eloquently demonstrated by the fact that he acquired properties for himself in his native town, Kecskemét and when he died he was taken there for burial even though his family has a crypt in the Csongrád cemetery.” *Csongrádi Újság*, 22 March 1908. Vol. VI, no. 12, p. 2.

53 Communication from Gábor Barna.

54 *Csongrádi Újság*, 22 March 1908. Vol. VI, no. 12, p. 2.

55 *Csongrádi Újság*, 22 March 1908. Vol. VI, no. 12, p. 2.

56 As we can read in an April issue of *Csongrádi Újság*: “Ever since Károly Hornyik departed this earthly life, hardly a Sunday goes by without a cantor candidate attempting to win the post that promises great expectations and a generous income.” *Csongrádi Újság*, 12 April 1908. Vol. VI, no. 15, p. 3.

57 NPI 1 May 1908. Summary of the minutes of the meeting of Roman Catholic representatives held on the election of a cantor.

in July and August due to their many pressing duties.”⁵⁸ However, since Károly Hornyik’s widow could remain in the cantor’s house until 1st October and could also draw her deceased husband’s remuneration, the unanimous intention of the parish priest and the council could not be realised.

As the months passed, rumours began to spread; many once again suspected that chief notary Söhlya was behind the delay, assuming that he secretly wanted to make his son Károly István Hornyik, cantor of Csongrád.⁵⁹ István Hornyik could have been a major factor in the approaching election, but in 1908 he was still only a student, he did not have the required certificate. *Tiszavidék* expressed the most regret over the break in the Csongrád career of the Söhlya-Hornyik cantor dynasty. In one article they went so far as to suggest that the criterion of a teaching certificate should be dropped from the announcement, as “it is entirely superfluous [...], because the post of cantor of Csongrád ensures a sufficiently high income without having to bother with teaching”.⁶⁰

Illés Kalmár undertook the long journey from Salgótarján to Csongrád several times to sing at Sunday mass as evidence of his determination. His appearance always attracted the interest of the press, the number of his “fans” in Csongrád grew steadily.⁶¹ The rumour spread that he owned his beautiful, deep baritone voice to a mechanism implanted in his chest.⁶²

Signature of Illés Kalmár on the application form for the post of Csongrád cantor.
NPI 24 August 1908.

58 NPI 1 May 1908. Summary of the minutes of the meeting of Roman Catholic representatives held on the election of a cantor.

59 *Csongrádi Újság*, 26 April 1908. Vol. VI, no. 17, pp. 2–3.

60 *Tiszavidék*, 12 July 1908. Vol. XIX, no. 28, p. 3.

61 “On Wednesday and on Thursday, Corpus Christi, Illés Kalmár cantor of Salgótarján was present in our town. On those days he served as cantor and drew very warm recognition, surprising people with his excellent voice and beautiful organ-playing. His service on those two days further increased the already large number of people recognising his qualities and he can have great hope of winning the coming cantor election.” *Csongrádi Újság*, 21 June 1908. Vol. VI, no. 25, p. 2.

62 *Csongrádi Újság*, 6 September 1908. Vol. XVIII, no. 36, p. 2.

Illés Kalmár's most popular rival was 57-year-old József Kulcsár, cantor of Ókéske. Kulcsár's name had appeared among the applicants in 1907, but because he was a good friend of Károly Hornyik, in the end he did not appear on the day of the election.⁶³ *Csongrádi Lap* recognised Kalmár's talent but threw its full support behind Kulcsár. However, this position required a convincing justification. According to the paper's explanation Kalmár had the qualities of an artist but the congregation could not keep up with the range of his singing voice, while József Kulcsár's manner of singing was easier to follow and more in line with popular songs. Consequently Illés Kalmár is supported by the gentry, while the cantor from Ókéske is the "people's choice", he is the second "uncle Sóhlya".⁶⁴ He is the man who is welcomed with open arms outside the church, in whose singing they find real consolation and joy.⁶⁵ It is interesting that a year previously, in another local paper Illés Kalmár was the "people's choice" in competition against Hornyik.

Acceptance of the view that the cantor elections point beyond the person of the winning cantor, that in reality it is conflicting social interests that come to the surface and clash, transformed Kiskundorozsma into a battlefield in 1892. But nothing like that happened in Csongrád, indeed, due to an oversight by one of the editors the Kulcsár campaign almost became ridiculous.

In its 14 June issue *Csongrádi Lap* printed a letter from a reader under the name of "a person able to sing", that was largely in line with the paper's communication strategy. But in addition to the obligatory contrasting of "gentleman-artist-Kalmár" and "people's cantor-Kulcsár" an unusual argument was included: "now the people adore him [Kulcsár] even more, because his masterly song to the Virgin Mary was heard in heaven, and that same evening the heavenly channels opened up and brought the blessing of gentle rain to our thirsty land."⁶⁶ In the next issue the editor-in-chief János Éder outdid himself in expressing annoyance and apologising for the publication of the reader's letter: "The above-mentioned letter is utterly foolish both in its direction and its value, I must protest against the intrusion of this article and apologise to our reading public for its publication".⁶⁷ János Éder also revealed that the anonymous letter was the work of the primary school teacher Imre Mészáros. The teacher then tried to defend his religious sentiments in the columns of *Tiszavidék* to which Éder responded with an article under the title "religious or stupid?".⁶⁸

The third applicant who appeared quite frequently in Csongrád was Ármin Fehér cantor of Ada. Fehér had been among the five best candidates in 1907, but he received only one vote. But in 1908 he clearly seized every opportunity to

63 *Csongrádi Lap*, 29 March 1908. Vol. VI, no. 13, p. 2.

64 "It cannot be accepted that in a town with 24,000 inhabitants a few individuals impose on the public a cantor that the public does not like, however good his voice may be, but if the public cannot sing with him!" *Csongrádi Lap*, 26 April 1908. Vol. VI, no. 17, pp. 2–3.

65 *Csongrádi Lap*, 12 April 1908. Vol. VI, no. 15, p. 3.

66 *Csongrádi Lap*, 14 June 1908. Vol. VI, no. 24, p. 2.

67 *Csongrádi Lap*, 21 June 1908. Vol. XVIII, no. 25, p. 2.

68 *Csongrádi Lap*, 5 July 1908. Vol. XVIII, no. 27, pp. 2–3.

improve his chances of being elected.⁶⁹ *Csongrádi Újság* wrote positively about his singing demonstrations. It was regarded as a promising result that he was able to sing at mass on the feast day of the Csongrád parish church.⁷⁰ József Petróczy, cantor of Hevescsány who was barely 25 years old, served on a Sunday in May.⁷¹ Gyula Pelle, singer from Alsóábrány served as cantor on Palm Sunday – he was not among the applicants in 1907.⁷² *Tiszavidék* write about this cantor with an excellent voice and good manner as Illés Kalmár's only serious challenger.⁷³ On Ascension Day Elemér Csornák, son of the chief cantor of Kecskemét, Gábor Csornák sang during high mass. *Csongrádi Újság* described him as a young musician with real talent.⁷⁴ In August Pál Boldizsár of Zagyvarékas, Nándor Salamon of Kálkápolna, Lőrinc Simonyi of Nagyszalonta and Árpád Kutor of Kaposvár all paid their respects in Csongrád.⁷⁵ We know nothing about where the cantors stayed or who they were in contact with during their stay in Csongrád. What is certain is that these visits mainly added to the social capital of the candidates who had had the best chances at the 1907 election, while they provided an opportunity for the new applicants to introduce themselves and gather information. As for the position taken by the local papers: *Csongrádi Újság* principally supported Illés Kalmár, but at the same time it tried to write fairly about the performances of the other cantors. *Csongrádi Lap* proclaimed József Kulcsár to be the only worthy candidate, while *Tiszavidék* made the same claim for Gyula Pelle. It was certainly becoming clear even before the post was announced who would be the front runners among the applicants. In the meantime a brief item appeared in an August issue of *Tiszavidék* stating that Bertalan Zubek, the barely 20-years-old recently graduated cantor teacher in Csongrád would also be among the applicants.⁷⁶

At its meeting on 13 July the local council took note of the resolution of the episcopal see of Vác setting the date of the Csongrád cantor election for 27 August.⁷⁷ The date was already known in May⁷⁸, but the announcement did not appear in the papers until July. The text was as follows:

“Applications are invited for the post of RC cantor in Csongrád vacant due to a death. The annual income of the cantor to be elected: 1. 800 crowns paid by the municipality. 2. Around 3000 crowns in surplice fees 3. Usufruct of 30 kat. hold (17 hectares) of arable land 4. House and garden in kind. The elected cantor shall provide services in both

69 *Csongrádi Újság*, 26 April 1908. Vol. VI, no. 17, p. 3.

70 *Csongrádi Újság*, 9 August 1908. Vol. VI, no. 32, p. 3.

71 *Csongrádi Újság*, 10 May 1908. Vol. VI, no. 19, p. 3.

72 *Csongrádi Újság*, 5 April 1908. Vol. VI, no. 14, p. 3.

73 *Tiszavidék*, 5 April 1908. Vol. XIX, no. 14, p. 3.

74 *Csongrádi Újság*, 19 July 1908 Vol. VI, no. 29, p. 2.

75 *Csongrádi Újság*, 9 August 1908. Vol. VI, no. 32, p. 2; *Csongrádi Újság*, 23 August 1908. Vol. VI, no. 34, p. 2.

76 *Tiszavidék*, 15 August 1908. Vol. XIX, no. 33, p. 2.

77 MNL CSMML CSL Minutes of the Csongrád Municipal Council V. B. 71. a 32. 13 July 1908, minutes no. 230.

78 *Csongrádi Újság*, 24 May 1908. Vol. VI, no. 21, p. 1.

churches and keep an assistant with a pleasant voice, fully competent in singing, organ-playing and rites. Requirements: cantor's certificate, teaching diploma or certificate of activity; certificate of baptism, certificate of marriage in the case of a married cantor, and certificates of good conduct for the entire duration of professional activity. The successful applicant shall comply with the regulations concerning records and list of charges in collecting surplice fees and funeral fees, and in all other matters. The chosen candidate will be confirmed in the post after a trial period of one year. Applications are to be sent by 25 August to abbot-parish priest József Porubszky. The election will be held on 27 August; the audition will be held on 8 a.m. of that day. The post is to be occupied on 1 October. During the period of applications, candidates are allowed to give demonstrations in the church.⁷⁹

By his own admission Illés Kalmár applied for the post of Csongrád cantor in response to the announcement published in the 12 July 1908 issue of *Csongrádi Újság*. Why he did not cite the nationally distributed *Néptanítók Lapja* or *Népnevelők*, we do not know. Perhaps the newspaper reached him in distant Salgótarján through his supporters in Csongrád, as Kalmár did not visit the town in mid-July.⁸⁰

The members of the Csongrád council last discussed the approaching election in the middle of August. Compared to the practice of the previous year they adopted the following changes: during the audition only the applicants and the council members could be present in the sanctuary of the church; before the audition each cantor was to introduce himself verbally to the council members; the candidates with the best chances were also to sing outdoors, outside the church so that the auditioners could hear how their voice would carry at funerals.⁸¹

Course of the election of a cantor in 1908

While in 1907 27 applications were received, in 1908 24 cantors applied for the post of cantor in Csongrád:

Bimbó, Pál (33) Üllő
Boldizsár, Pál (38) Zagyvarékas
Cséka, Aladár (32) Kolozsvár
Csomák, Elemér (21) Kecskemét
Farkas, Nándor
Fehér, Ármin (36) Ada

⁷⁹ *Csongrádi Újság*, 12 July 1908. Vol. VI, no. 28, p. 2.

⁸⁰ NPI Application submitted by cantor Illés Kalmár, 24 August 1908.

⁸¹ *Csongrádi Újság*, 23 August 1908. Vol. VI, no. 34, no. 2.

Földes, Gábor (22) Alsónémedi
 Hencz, Mihály (51) Párkány
 Kalmár, Illés (38) Salgótarján
 Kulcsár, József (57) Újkécske [now: Tiszaécske]
 Kutor, Antal (54) Nagyatád
 Kutor, Árpád (26) Kaposvár
 Lakatos, Pál (30) Pusztaszenttamás [part of Törökszentmiklós]
 Lépi, József (27) Máriapócs
 Megyesi, Géza (24) Szolnok
 Pelle, Gyula (26) Alsóábrány [now: Bükkábrány]
 Petróczky, József (25) Hevescsány [now: Csány]
 Ress, Lőrinc (25) Brassó
 Simonyi, Lőrinc (31) Nagyszalonta
 Szabó, Gyula (26) Bába
 Szappanos, Imre (45) Sátoraljaújhely
 Tary, Lajos (24) Szatmárnémeti
 Ujházy, Miklós (45) Endrőd [now: Gyomaendrőd]
 Zubek, Bertalan (20) Csongrád⁸²

Of the 24 applicants, nine had already tried their chances in 1907 (Árpád Kutor, Kulcsár, Szappanos, Kalmár, Ujházy, Szabó, Pelle, Petróczy, Fehér). Illés Kalmár, József Pelle, Ármin Fehér and Miklós Ujházy had good reason to hope; in the previous year they were the strongest candidates. Nándor Farkas and Mihály Hencz did not include a certificate with their application, so they could not take part in the audition.

Looking back from the distance of a century, we can see which of the applicants later became nationally known. Besides Miklós Ujházy the cantor-poet who was very popular among his colleagues. A talented young man also appears: Elemér Csomák, son of the chief cantor of Kecskemét, who was only 21 at the time but went on to become cantor of the Szeged cathedral and conductor of the choir.

If we once again look on the map at the places where the applicants for the post of cantor in Csongrád were active, we find that the town continues to be most attractive for cantors in the Danube–Tisza interfluvium, in Jász–Nagykun–Szolnok county, and to a lesser extent for cantors in northern Hungary. Four cantors from Transylvania, three from Transdanubia and one from Southern Hungary (Délvidék) also applied. The number of candidates from Transylvania increased, from Délvidék it fell, and this time there were no applicants from Upper Hungary. Lőrinc Ress, cantor in Brassó came from the furthest away. In both 1907 and 1908 the majority of candidates came from settlements to the north of Csongrád, travelling an average of 150 km. One wonders why there were no applicants from Csépa, Kunszentmárton, Kiskunfélegyháza, settlements with

82 MNL CsML CsL Minutes of the Csongrád Municipal Council V. B. 71. a 32. 13 July 1908, minutes no. 292.

economic, commercial and marriage connections with Csongrád, or from the Catholic parish of Szentés.



Posts held by applicants for the 1908 cantor election. Compiled by: Orsolya Gyöngyössi 2016.

The scenario for the general assembly to elect a cantor followed the same procedure as in the previous year, with the supplements mentioned above. The principal actors (district archdeacon, district chief administrative officer, parish priest) remained the same. The district archdeacon began by calling on the council members to form a nine-member nominations committee. The committee members were the same as in the previous year, with the exception of the former parish priest Antal Hegyi, chief notary Gyula Sóhlya and Imre Nagypál.⁸³ After the committee was set up the council members entered the church to hear the auditions.

In this case we have the original copy of the opinion of the music experts. The record consists of very brief characterisations set out in columns; In the first column is the candidate's name, in the second the place where he is active. The third column is devoted to qualification of the candidate's "vocal material" (strong/ weak/ high/ low/ pleasant/ mature/ trained/ undeveloped/ ringing/ husky

⁸³ The members of the committee were: Antal Hegyi, István Ludrovai Tóth, Gyula Sóhlya, Elemér Kovács, Pál Szőke, József Szabados, Imre Nagypál, János Máté, István Kaszaniczky. MNL CsML CsL Minutes of the Csongrád Municipal Council V. B. 71. a 32. 13 July 1908. minutes no. 292.



Illés Kalmár cantor.
MNL CsML CsL Photo archive II.h.107-1.

baritone/ tenor/ bass). The organ-playing and singing technique were evaluated on a scale of one to four (one was the best). The responses, the chanting heard in response between priest and cantor during mass were qualified as “apt” or “uncertain”. The age of the candidate was entered in the last column. The minutes were signed by teacher Ferenc Keviczky, Antal Ulrich, Pál Korpás district archdeacon and stationmaster Frigyes Pesthy as music expert.⁸⁴

The music experts found Illés Kalmár’s baritone with a broad range the most convincing, followed by Lajos Tary, Ármin Fehér, Gyula Pelle and Pál Bimbó. They did not list József Kulcsár who was being promoted as “the people’s cantor”. After the list was read out, Ármin Fehér announced his intention to withdraw.

While in the previous year council members could vote only for the candidates recommended by the music experts, in 1908 they could vote for any candidate. This is how it came about that Bertalan Zubek from Csongrád also received six votes in spite of the fact that the music experts judged his organ-playing to be weak, his singing technique middling and his voice husky and untrained.⁸⁵ Two members voted for Gyula Pelle and four – including the chief notary – for Pál Bimbó. On this occasion Illés Kalmár also won the approval of parish priest Porubszky, Antal Hegyi and a further twenty-one council members⁸⁶, as a result, from the first of October 1908 he became the chief cantor of Csongrád with a one-year trial period.⁸⁷

84 NPI Minutes of the cantor election 27 August 1908. “List of the RC cantors who sang at the audition for cantors held in Csongrád on 27 August 1908.”

85 NPI Minutes of the cantor election 27 August 1908. “List of the RC cantors who sang at the audition for cantors held in Csongrád on 27 August 1908.”

86 MNL CsML CsL Minutes of the Csongrád Municipal Council V. B. 71. a 32. 13 July 1908. minutes no. 296.

87 The contract stated that he would be confirmed in the post after one year “if he has proved worthy with his religious and exemplary life and his diligence in office”. NPI 27 September 1908. Letter from Lajos Virter episcopal vicar to Pál Korpás district archdeacon.

Press reaction to the election

In a series of articles in the following weeks *Csongrádi Újság* described the atmosphere of the days leading up to the election and gave glimpses into happenings “behind the scenes”.

The author of one of the articles asked people in the street who they thought had the best chance, who would make the best cantor. The reporter first came up against the “belief” that the post of cantor in Csongrád was the best paid in the country. This seemed to be a firmly held conviction among the faithful of Csongrád.⁸⁸ The first person interviewed thought that Illés Kalmár would be the next cantor of Csongrád, but he himself would like to see Ármin Fehér at the organ. “Because it seems to me that while Kalmár has a great big voice, there is no ‘symmetry’ in it. Fehér’s voice may be a bit thin but he can bring out the words very pleasantly. And it is not a blackbird that the gentlemen keep in a cage but a nightingale.”⁸⁹ The next person interviewed, who had the look of someone “with an average fate” would have voted for Bertalan Zubek: “Why should we support outsiders when we have no idea who they are or where they come from? This at least is one of our sons, he would value us more too.”⁹⁰ This view reflects a kind of self-defence mechanism, a reservation in face of foreign elements unknown to the community. As a historical precedent it is worth mentioning here that in the late 18th century the holder of the advowson did not allow a cantor from “elsewhere” to operate in Csongrád.⁹¹

By the afternoon of 26 August all the applicants were in the town. They strolled around the streets, gathered in groups to chat, or “ran around in carriages chasing votes”⁹². In the evening they gathered in the Magyar Király [King of Hungary] hotel for supper and to weigh their chances. That same night József Petróczy Junior changed his mind and left Csongrád on the early morning train.

Early in the morning on the 27th the cantors prepared to be judged: they sang scales to clear their voices, ate raw eggs, drank “Margit water” or brandy.

An enormous crowd gathered to see the applicants enter the church sanctuary. As the vicar called the cantors by name one by one to the organ they walked from the centre of the nave to the steps of the balcony “so that the people could see their faces and avoid accidentally choosing someone with a squint”.⁹³ The cantors had to play a given hymn with organ accompaniment, then answer the priest with an impromptu response. None of the reporters recorded the titles of all the hymns set. It is, however, certain that *Our Lady, hope of our homeland* was

88 *Csongrádi Újság*, 6 September 1908. Vol. XVIII, no. 36, p. 2.

89 *Csongrádi Újság*, 6 September 1908. Vol. XVIII, no. 36, p. 2.

90 *Csongrádi Újság*, 6 September 1908. Vol. XVIII, no. 36, p. 2.

91 Gyöngyössy 2014. 118–119.

92 *Csongrádi Újság*, 6 September 1908. Vol. XVIII, no. 36, p. 2.

93 *Csongrádi Újság*, 6 September 1908. Vol. XVIII, no. 35, pp. 1–2.

heard at least once during the audition.⁹⁴ The press evaluated the performance of the cantors as follows:

"Pál Bimbó from Üllő: his organ-playing is satisfactory, his voice strong, his singing drags, lisps on the last syllable and responses regular. [...] *Ármin Fehér* from Ada: organ-playing proficient, voice clear, ringing and soaring, his singing flexible, comprehensible, but a little tremolo, responses inventive. [...] *Illés Kalmár* from Salgótarján: organ-playing artistic, voice enchanting, sonorous, crystal-clear and transparent, singing flexible and intelligent, responses impressive. [...] *Gyula Pelle* from Alsó-Ábrány: organ-playing competent, voice ringing, soaring, singing flexible, pleasant, responses inventive. [...] *Lajos Tari* from Szatmár: organ-playing proficient, voice soaring and ringing, singing fluent, comprehensible, responses inventive. [...] *Bertalan Zubek* from Csongrád: organ-playing unpractised, voice powerful, singing untrained, responses faulty."⁹⁵

On this occasion Pál Bimbó's performance was disappointing. He received very weak applause at the audition and already in the church the faithful spoke of him as defeated. Ármin Fehér drew warm applause for his refined singing technique, while Illés Kalmár was greeted with thunderous applause and cries of approval already when his name was called. The trust placed in him was rewarded: "The cries were quickly silenced by a big, imposing, well-trained, deep baritone voice that, together with the excellent playing, held the public captive so that the listeners were hardly able to find suitable expression for their approval."⁹⁶ Gyula Pelle and Lajos Tari did not stand out from the other applicants, while Bertalan Zubek was in need of protection: "He has just completed his teacher training, so he cannot have much experience. Nevertheless the pleasant singing and the fine voice show that he has great promise."⁹⁷

After the music experts submitted their opinion, the district archdeacon called on the cantors who volunteered to stand on the announcement stone in front of the town hall and sing the first verse of the penitential psalm *Have mercy my Lord*. Besides the five selected cantors and Bertalan Zubek, only Miklós Ujházy undertook this test. This was followed by a closed session of the council, then Ármin Fehér's withdrawal.

The victory of Illés Kalmár was announced at noon to the crowd waiting outside the town hall. The response of the faithful was mixed: "some grumbled that it is always the gentry who win, the will of the people never prevails. Others

⁹⁴ *Csongrádi Újság*, 6 September 1908. Vol. XVIII, no. 35, pp. 1-2.

⁹⁵ *Csongrádi Újság*, 6 September 1908. Vol. XVIII, no. 35, pp. 1-2.

⁹⁶ *Csongrádi Újság*, 6 September 1908. Vol. XVIII, no. 36, p. 2.

⁹⁷ *Csongrádi Újság*, 6 September 1908. Vol. XVIII, no. 36, p. 2. Not long after, Bertalan Zubek was appointed to Tápióbicske, where he served as cantor until his death (1965). József Kulcsár, the other applicant considered to have excellent chances, continued his career in Alsómocsolád.

complained that Bertalan Zubek had been passed over, still others deplored the neglect of Pál Bimbó. But the majority welcomed the success of the election because it was a fact that this time the most competent applicant has been chosen as Csongrád cantor."⁹⁸

A few days later József Szabados, a council member and savings bank teller, declared in a statement that Ármin Fehér had withdrawn at his recommendation. It had become clear to him that because of the strong propaganda of the "opposite party", the cause of his protégé was doomed to failure; in such a situation an honest man could only show his disapproval by withdrawing.⁹⁹ In early September Szabados launched an appeal against the result of the cantor election. It was rejected by the episcopal see of Vác. The representative did not give up but began to seek redress from the archiepiscopal see in Esztergom. The decision made by the archiepiscopal see on 21 November reveals that Szabados accused Illés Kalmár of bribery. His only "evidence" was an easily misunderstood remark made by the mill owner Mátyás Eszes, but the holy see did not find it sufficiently convincing.¹⁰⁰

At the end of the one-year trial period the episcopal see of Vác confirmed Illés Kalmár in his post in protocol no. 393 dated 6 December 1909. Kalmár served the diocese of Csongrád in this post right up until his death in 1946.

Lessons of the Csongrád cantor elections

The example of the cantor elections held in Csongrád in 1907 and 1908 shows how the selection and hiring of a lay church assistant could become a public life and political event pointing beyond itself and revealing the local balance of forces. In the case of Csongrád, the prestige of chief cantor Antal Sohlya who had served for 40 years, and the influence of Gyula Söhlya who struggled his way up to the post of chief notary were brought into play in support of Károly Hornyik. As a result the election of Hornyik did not necessarily reflect the local taste in church music and demands, but rather the balance of political forces. The cantor's person became a political symbol, even proof of the "force" of Gyula Söhlya, and the cantor election became a symbolic rite. Károly Hornyik was referred to in the press either as a "person with influence but no talent" or as a loyal cantor who had earned merit in his post. The Csongrád career of the Sohlya-Hornyik cantor

⁹⁸ *Csongrádi Újság*, 6 September 1908. Vol. XVIII, no. 35, pp. 1–2.

⁹⁹ *Csongrádi Újság*, 6 September 1908. Vol. XVIII, no. 35, pp. 1–2.

¹⁰⁰ NPI s.d. letter from the Prince Primate. (copy) Signed by: bishop Lajos Rajner and an archiepiscopal notary (the letter was entered into the records in Vác on 17 December 1908. According to József Szabados, Mátyás Eszes said that if Illés Kalmár is elected Csongrád cantor, he would donate a large sum for renovation of the organ. However, Eszes only admitted to declaring that "if they elect a good cantor", he would donate more generously.

dynasty came to an end with the death of Károly Hornyik and because István Hornyik was too young.

An examination of the “migration” of cantors allows us to conclude that in finding new positions for themselves the church singers did not insist at all costs on a place near to the place where they were born or even within a particular church diocese or geographical/linguistic/cultural region. In submitting applications for a post they were guided by the income offered, the denominational proportions, the “reputation” of the congregation and the parish priest, and dissatisfaction with the place where they were active at the time. As in many cases their father and grandfather had also earned their living as a teacher or cantor teacher, they must have been accustomed from early childhood to a “nomadic” life. The occupation of cantor thus involved a degree of mobility unusual at that time and required considerable adaptability. At the same time in the case of Csongrád it can be seen that the two most important cantors of the 19th century served for 40 and 50 years respectively, right up to their deaths. The only cantor in the 98% Roman Catholic settlement enjoyed high social prestige and a solid income, and also had favourable marriage opportunities¹⁰¹; the chief cantors of Csongrád thus had little urge to leave the town. At least no record has yet been found indicating that any of the Csongrád cantors ever wanted to leave their post to find better prospects elsewhere.

101 Lajos Kmeth arrived in Csongrád as a young, unmarried cantor in the 1840s. His first wife was from the prosperous Bauersax family. After she died, he married Márta, the daughter of the old bellringer (and successful tradesman) György Keviczky. Antal Sohlya (the son of a shepherd from Kiskunmajsa) was already married when he arrived in Csongrád: his wife Anna was the daughter of Dániel Vargyasi, a descendant of the Transylvanian landed gentry. See: Gyöngyössi 2014. 125–127.

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